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GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



BULLETIN No. 34

# WHOOPING COUGH

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
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# WHOOPIING COUGH

Whooping cough occurs in epidemics which vary greatly in severity, some being mild and others severe. In 1935 Whooping cough caused the death of more people in Saskatchewan than did Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever, Small Pox, Measles, Typhoid Fever and Infantile Paralysis combined.

The "germs" of the disease are very plentiful in the throat during the early stages, especially before the "whoop" commences. This is the most dangerous time for its spread by droplets of moisture expelled during coughing. For that reason children with coughs should be provided with plenty of soft paper handkerchiefs which can be burned after they are used. Whooping cough is communicable before the whoop starts and for about three weeks after the commencement of the whooping. Each case must be isolated for three weeks after commencement of the whooping, and contacts must be isolated for fourteen days after last exposure unless immune by a previous attack. The bread-winner may be released.

All persons are susceptible to whooping cough but the age of greatest susceptibility is six months to five years. IT IS EXTREMELY FATAL TO CHILDREN UNDER ONE YEAR; THEREFORE IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT BABIES BE KEPT AWAY FROM ALL PERSONS WHO HAVE COUGHS. One attack confers immunity, and it is rare for any person to have a second.

The disease begins with an ordinary cough, which may last from a few days to two weeks, then the characteristic paroxysmal cough sets in, and during the spell of severe coughing the child gets red or blue in the face, the eyes water and get red. In severe fits

of coughing, vomiting follows. Mild cases may not have the characteristic "whoop", but are a means of spreading the disease.

Pertussis Vaccine is used to prevent the disease, with encouraging results. If the disease does occur in inoculated individuals it is less severe, and the deaths of those so protected are fewer. For prophylaxis three injections are given, three weeks apart.

This vaccine is now supplied free of charge to physicians by the Department of Public Health.

The dangerous nature of whooping cough is not realized by the public generally. There is a high mortality from it under five years of age, due to complications and diseases of the chest which are the direct result of whooping cough.

The vital statistics compiled by the Department of Public Health —show that in 1935—90 died from whooping cough as against 10 from Scarlet Fever; in 1936—50 died from whooping cough and 16 from Scarlet Fever; in 1937—47 died from whooping cough and 16 from Scarlet Fever. (Scarlet Fever is publicly recognized as a serious communicable disease.)

This comparison indicates how seriously whooping cough should be considered.

The disease usually develops about two weeks after exposure to the infection, and it is necessary that the patient should be isolated at the first sign of cough, as it is in the early catarrhal stage that the disease is most infectious. It is not necessary to keep him entirely indoors, but he should not be allowed to take exercise where there are other people or go to any public place. Patients should not be allowed out of isolation until the cough has entirely ceased. The regulations of the Department of Public Health require

isolation for three weeks from the time "whooping" commences. Persons living in the same house need not be isolated unless in contact with the patient and the Medical Health Officer is satisfied that the patient is satisfactorily isolated.

The control of whooping cough is in the hands of the public; parents must be taught to look upon it as a serious disease with a high death rate among children, and to carefully isolate children suffering from it and avoid contact with all having coughs.

As tuberculosis can often be traced back to an attack of whooping cough, be sure to have your children's chests examined shortly after an attack to make sure tuberculosis has not been a complication.

Many physicians are finding that Pertussis Vaccine gives satisfactory results in the prevention of this disease. It is available free to doctors from the Department of Public Health.

The Medical Health Officer should be notified at once of any case or suspected cases of whooping cough in your home.

Remember that early isolation may prevent an epidemic.

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